

Comments to Localism Task Force  
July 8, 2004

As an Americas Program Associate of the non-profit Interhemispheric Resource Center (IRC), a web-based policy-analysis media center, and as co-director of the independent media project Journalism to Raise Environmental Awareness, I attended the FCC's Rapid City, S.D., hearing on localism in broadcasting May 26.

In the wake of that hearing and others scheduled by the commissioners, as well as the June decision by the U.S. Third Circuit Court to protect against concentration of media power in a few hands, I endorse Commissioner Michael Copps' call for a broader series of hearings across the country to give citizens access to agency decision makers and media representatives immediately.

The results of the proposed hearings, together with independent research on the effects of media consolidation, should be used to reform FCC rules in the interest of protecting media democracy.

These hearings are especially important in light of the fact that Commission Chairman Michael Powell and others at the FCC are displeased with the court ruling. Their recalcitrance bodes ill for the agency's efforts to comply with the court's orders. In calling for more hearings, in fact, Commissioner Copps is responding to a demand civil society made.

With the fourth of the original six localism hearings being held in Monterey, Calif., on July 21, I would also like to respond to Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein's request for suggestions on ways to strengthen the FCC rules in the interest of protecting localism.

One simple improvement would be to assure tribal government and non-governmental organizations' oversight on broadcasters' license renewals.

I have a masters degree in International Journalism and more than 30 years of media experience since my first internship for Rapid City's locally owned and operated Duhamel Broadcasting Co. My goal as a journalist is to increase media coverage of and media access for underserved constituents.

It was disturbing to me to discover at the Rapid City hearing that the inequality of service to indigenous constituents continues in this broadcast area, despite its relatively high concentration of Native American residents and despite decades of efforts by civil society to break that pattern.

Testimony was polarized during the many hours in which my number to testify orally did not come up (under the system devised by the FCC to provide two minutes to each participant who wanted to speak). If I had been able to remain at the meeting after 10:30 p.m. to await my turn, I would have made the following observation:

Representatives of the conventionally well-served and established non-Indian interests, such as United Way, YMCA, and American Red Cross, lined up at the microphone to make sure media owners heard them testify to how grateful they are for the fantastic cooperation their charitable and community organizations receive. Meanwhile, representatives of the lesser-known, more diffuse indigenous agencies, regardless of their governmental status or non-governmental ties, complained, one after another, that they experience discrimination and scant coverage of their concerns by the same media.

Now that these issues have been amply expressed to the stations, thanks to the hearing, the next step for the disenfranchised would logically be to file complaints to the FCC.

As part of my efforts to improve communities right to know in the aforementioned independent media organizations, I submit that: The FCC should encourage more participation in the complaint and license renewal process by implementing mandatory citizen oversight mechanisms, which will lead to more Native American participation in the media at all levels.

Thank you for your attention.  
Sincerely,  
Talli Nauman